No. 202

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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OF RELIGION

February 23rd, 1944

DEAR MEMBER,

The Assistant Secretary of State in the United States, Mr. A. A. Berle, drew attention in a recent speech to the fact that the rise of population in Russia and its decline elsewhere is leading to a state of things in which the inhabitants of Soviet Russia will before long out-number the combined populations of Central and Western Europe. Too many people go on hatching their little plans for a future international order without taking any account of these tidal movements in human history.

THE ADVENT OF RUSSIA

The slow, silent shift in the balance of human forces, momentous as it is, is made doubly significant by the astounding outburst of vital energies among the Russian peoples and their impending triumph over Germany. For many centuries two civilizations have confronted one another on the Eastern marches of Europe, interacting and exerting continuous pressure on one another. The dominant pressure for many generations was from the West upon the East. There has been a sudden and swift reversal of direction, which promises to be decisive. The emergence of Russia as a major factor in the life of Europe and of the world is the beginning of a new era in human history.

The rise of Russia is indeed only one manifestation of a still wider movement. Mr. Berle spoke not only of the changes in population ratios, but also of the profound effect of industrialization and war on the vast populations of Asia. Instead of being outside the main stream of action, as they have been hitherto, the Asiatic peoples are likely in the future to exert a direct influence on the economics, production and politics of the world. From the close of the fifteenth century the expansion of Western peoples and Western influences has been continuous, until at the turn of the present century the predominance of Western civilization seemed to be assured throughout the world. Within a life-time we see the tide which for so long flowed in one direction beginning to turn. It is on the portent of Russia, however, that in this Letter we want to fix our eyes.

When the Nazis gained control over nearly the whole of Europe, it became apparent to them that the idea of race or nation was not one on which a European or a world dominion could be based. Some universal idea was required, and the one which they have tried to exploit is that of the defence of the West or the crusade against Bolshevism. But while the cry may have served them in some quarters, the hollowness of the pretension was evident. The Nazis were incapable of defending the European heritage, because they had already betrayed it.

It is true that the dominant outlook with which Russia enters upon its leading rôle in world affairs is a body of ideas that have been imported from the West. But what we are witnessing is only the first act of the drama. The influence and policy of Russia in world affairs will be determined in the long run by the collective contribution of two hundred or more millions of people, whose outlook and attitude has been formed under the influence of the illimitable spaces of the Eurasian continent by historical experiences very different from those which have gone to the making of the Western tradition.

An event of such historical magnitude as the rise of Russia plainly lays on us new responsibilities. It compels us to learn to think on a new scale. We must abandon for good the attempt to frame plans for a world order based on Anglo-Saxon assumptions, and widen our understanding to include points of view quite different from our own.

It is also plain that these fateful events compel us to ask what lessons of life have been learned in more than 2,000 years of European history which we must at all costs carry into the future. It is not only in Germany that men have turned their backs on the Western tradition. Its disintegration may be seen everywhere. The spirit of scepticism and questioning of all values has spread throughout the whole Western world. It ought to cause us deep concern that it is the material and acquisitive side of Western civilization that has had so powerful and revolutionary an effect on the rest of the world. There is little hope for the future of mankind unless men recover the truth about themselves as spiritual beings. It is in the tradition and experience of the West that the understanding of man's true nature as free and finite, fallen and redeemed, has been most deeply apprehended and its implications have been most fully worked out. Because there is enshrined in that tradition the best that man has thus far learned and known, the Western peoples, no matter what equilibrium of power may ultimately be reached, have an irreplaceable contribution to make to the future progress and well-being of mankind and an inescapable responsibility for making it.

When we reflect on what is involved in these great changes, we find that it points directly to the subject of the recent Supplement by the Archbishop of Canterbury. That Supplement is concerned with a question on which far more hinges than can be put into words—the question whether in the five decisions which it enumerates as the right responses of man to his real and unalterable environment there is implicit a doctrine of society by which we can steer our course in the present and future and bring a new purpose into the lives of men. If such a clue has been given us, the next question is whether a group of people are prepared to make these decisions the fixed foundation of their thought and action and find out what they mean for the ordering of society.

WAR AND CIVILIZATION

The Bishop of Chichester deserves our thanks for asking the Government in a speech of great sincerity and courage in the House of Lords to make a statement about their policy in the bombing of enemy towns. The dynamic of war has so strong a tendency to engulf in its

blind fury every human value that it is right that we should be made to face the question where it is carrying us.

The issue debated in the Lords has to be judged on two different planes. On the military plane, which is the immediate concern and responsibility of a belligerent Government, the condition to which Hamburg and Berlin have been reduced by bombing does not differ from what Gern an armies have done to Stalingrad, Kharkov, Kiev and other Russian cities ; as Lord Cranborne pointed out, the shelling of towns in the front line is a recognized necessity of war, and the main industrial centres of Germany must be regarded as in the front line. While the bombing of cities is more horrifying to the imagination, it may be doubted whether it exacts a greater toll of suffering than blockade. Whether indiscriminate area bombing is indispensable as a means of bringing war production to a standstill is a question that can only be answered in the light of technical knowledge ; the Government may be right that the loss of 400,000,000 man-hours of work, which the bombing of Hamburg is estimated to have cost Germany in the ensuing three months, could have been brought about in no other way.

The deadly spiritual danger to which we are exposed does not lie in giving proper weight to these considerations, which are relevant on the military plane and may rightly determine the policy of the Government, but in being content to stop there and refusing to look beyond. The military case may be unanswerable, but it is only part of the total situation. The act of destroying war production destroys at the same time much that is of the highest value, wipes out for ever the unique products of man's skill and genius, scatters accumulations of books and treasures that are of benefit to the whole human race, and inflicts on human beings a vast amount of unmerited suffering, so that blows directed against the enemy pass imperceptibly into an attack on civilization and humanity itself.

It is sheer blindness to suppose that so fierce and absorbing an activity as war does not abound in perils to the soul and to the higher life of man. It is not a preacher but a soldier [1] who wrote recently that what is appalling in total war is not the destruction it causes, but the popular tendency to acquiesce in its horrors, and even to gloat over them. He quotes the lines :—

" ' And what shall I ride in ? ' quoth Lucifer then—
' If I followed my taste, indeed,
I should mount on a waggon of wounded men,
And smile to see them bleed.' "

and asserts that " this is the point at which Western civilization has now arrived. In sheer barbarity we can advance no farther unless in the next world-war the inhabitants of entire countries are exterminated."

It would be wrong for a Government engaged in war or for commanders in the field to allow themselves to be deflected by humanitarian sympathies from striking the hardest blows at the enemy. Severity in a particular instance may on a long view be the truest mercy. It is no less true that there are some risks that are worth taking for the sake of preserving our humanity. Such risks are in fact taken by the armies of civilized States, and have been taken by our armies in the present

[1] Major-General J. F. C. Fuller (whom I criticised in an earlier News-Letter for an article in an opposite sense) in the *Evening Standard*.

operations in Italy, in such matters as caring for the enemy wounded, accepting the surrender of prisoners, minimizing dangers to civilians and sparing sacred buildings and historic monuments, because, as was said recently in *The Tablet*, "it is necessary to win inside a certain tradition and setting, if victory is to be the beginning of better and not worse things."

The importance of the Bishop of Chichester's action lies in its reminder that we cannot afford to forget that even in war we are not simply combatants but also men, and as such are bound by inescapable obligations to our fellow-men, to the tasks of civilization and to God. The vital matter is not the decision we reach in regard to a particular act of war, e.g. whether we agree with the Bishop of Chichester about the bombing policy of the Government, but whether we are alive, as he is, to the momentous choice which the nation has to make, and from which there is no escape.

War, even when it is chosen for the highest ends, is full of danger to those who have recourse to it. It is the complete contradiction of man's creative powers, which are the expression of his manhood. It gives free rein to the lower, destructive impulses of human nature. The demon of destruction, like every appetite, grows by what it feeds on, and if we allow it to possess us in time of war we may find that it has grown to dimensions more formidable even than the menace of the Axis Powers. There is consequently no way of preventing even a just war from leading to unrelieved tragedy except by strenuous resistance to its terrible suction and downward drag and a resolute determination to oppose to its degrading and hideous destructiveness a firm, creative purpose. The grimmer the necessities of war become, the fiercer must grow our hatred of them, the stronger our passion to mitigate its horrors and bind up its wounds.

We are powerless in ourselves to escape from the spiritual danger that encompasses us. The very air we breathe is poisoned. Only God in His mercy can lighten our darkness, renew our spirits and flood our hearts with His infinite and universal pity. To Him we must turn, and in the Silent Minute, when the chimes of Big Ben invite us to a common act of recollection, we may make our cry to God in unison with a great company who have come to realize that spiritual renewal is our greatest need.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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FAMILIES IN FUTURE

By KATHLEEN BLISS

The British Council of Churches has published a pamphlet on "Home and Family Life," [1] which will undoubtedly be widely read and discussed in the churches.

Most statements of this kind begin from the teaching of the Bible and deduce the particular Christian attitude to marriage, sex relationships and family life. The method employed here is quite other. It begins by examining the economic and social forces which in the past century have changed the size of the family, its function in society, and the relationship of the members to each other. What answer can the Church give to that great number of people to-day who assume that society has undergone such radical changes and science has made such shattering discoveries that only those who put their heads in the sand and pretend that feudalism is still in full swing can persuade themselves that Christian moral standards still have validity and reality? The document shows a welcome realization of the fact that if Christians are to be listened to they must prove that they know the facts. Indeed many will already know the facts, which are not any different from those produced in a mass of secular literature and wireless talks by experts of all kinds in the field of sociology and vital statistics. There is a mass of material. What is needed is not that it should be swallowed whole, but that the reading of this statement should stimulate further thought and local action.

Nothing will make all the facts run in one direction. On the one hand we see the mounting number of divorce suits and evidence of increasing promiscuity in sex relations between men and women (C.N-L. Supplement, No. 184). On the other hand many chaplains, welfare officers and a host of others say that home dominates every other sentiment in the lives of millions of men and women. The desire for home life is there. Why then does the attempt to make a job of marriage end so often in frustration and disappointment.

What can we do? Here we get confused. When we have finished reading *Our Towns*, nothing seems so important as to sweep away the thousands of miserable hovels which pass as homes in the slums of our cities and to build places in which some semblance of a true family life becomes possible. When we turn to *Dis-*

[1] *Home and Family Life.* Student Movement Press, 1s.

inherited Youth,[1] and see once more the real horror of unemployment and its effect on young growing families, the establishment of some basic social security seems of the utmost urgency. All those and many other factors are important, but if we want to pierce to the heart of the problem and take hold of it, we are driven to two conclusions. First, marriage may be friendship, companionship, an economic partnership and many other sorts of relationship; but the basic fact about it is that it is founded on the sex relationship of man and woman. So long as current attitudes to and uses of the sexual instinct are distorted and false, so long will marriage prove unsatisfying. Put everything else right, leave this untouched and we are as far away from a realization of a true Christian home as a head-hunting aboriginal with twenty wives. Second, if a larger number of persons are to discover the full richness of Christian marriage, the strategic time is the time of courtship and the first year or two of marriage. Many young people who have been members of Youth clubs or other organizations, leave them and go off on their own as soon as they begin courting. The marriage takes place in church, but in a great number of cases they are not in touch with organized religion again until the children begin to come to Sunday school. Nor do they find help elsewhere. They get through the most fateful few years of their lives as best they can on their own, without help or advice.

SEX EDUCATION

Nothing is farther from the truth than to imagine that the modern generation is completely sophisticated about sex, knows all about it and has nothing to learn. The increasing burden of the evidence is that very large numbers of boys and girls pass through adolescence and even reach marriage with the scantiest equipment of factual knowledge and with a considerable dead weight of old wives' tales, prejudices, fears and unsatisfied curiosities.

The immediate conclusion is that parents have lamentably and extensively failed in their duty in not instructing their children in this most necessary form of knowledge. But before we attach blame to the present generation of parents, it is well to ask whether any previous generation has acquitted itself any better in this matter of giving instruction, or indeed whether the need for giving it has ever been so obvious. This is acutely a problem of urban life and of small families. The country child is not ignorant as is the town child of the birth of animals, the mating and nesting of birds. The whole reproductory function of nature is taken for granted. In the large family there was always a baby on the way

[1] *Disinherited Youth*. Carnegie Trust Survey of Unemployment in Liverpool, Glasgow and South Wales. Available only from the Carnegie Corporation.

or in the cradle, and it was born not, as is now almost universally the case, in a hospital but at home. Those were at least starting points, and they evoked children's questions at an earlier age, when they were more easily answerable.

Modern parents start at a serious disadvantage, and their failure must not be imputed universally to lack of courage, still less to lack of concern. Many are acutely aware of the dangers which surround growing boys and girls. But the surroundings of the home seldom provide a peg on which to hang their discourse ; they lack the vocabulary to express what they want to say, and, worst of all, the knowledge which they wish to give appears to them not as objective universal statements of a factual character, but a subjective disclosure of their own most private lives.

In School

It is necessary to say all this, because among many who care most for the revival of family life the instinctive reaction to the Board of Education's recent pamphlet on Sex Education in schools and youth organizations [1] will be : What next is to be taken from the family and placed on the shoulders of the school teacher ? The pamphlet contains no recommendations, still less a syllabus of sex education. It is compiled from the experiences of a large number of teachers on the need for sex education in schools and the way in which in some schools it has already been done. A number of facts are of great interest. There has certainly been no attempt, either by local education authorities or by teachers, to push the giving of sex education, or to make it a " school subject." The need has been impressed on teachers who are " disturbed at the prevalence of half-knowledge, leading as it often does to morbid curiosity and to legends which lead to fear and worry." " Our chief work," says one teacher, " seems to be to explode the legends passed on to the girls."

In practically every case parents have been consulted. One headmistress after meeting the parents was " horrified by the pathetic stories told of their own ignorance at marriage." The parents' response has been one of wholehearted appreciation, with a minute minority of objection. Some have commented that the teaching given at school makes it easier to talk at home. So far it appears that in the areas of about half the Local Education Authorities in England there is " carefully planned instruction in at least a few schools." About three girls' schools include sex instruction for every one boys' school. There is no uniform method of giving the instruction. It has to depend on the suitability and willingness

[1] *Sex Education in Schools and Youth Organizations.* Board of Education Pamphlet No. 19, H.M. Stationery Office, 6d.

of the staff, and on the curriculum. In some schools it takes the form of lectures by visiting doctors.

Whether sex education is given at home or not, the school has an important function to perform. That boys and girls should want to know how the remarkable miracle of birth takes place is no more odd or sinister than that they should want to know how a motor car works—and to give a coherent explanation of either is equally beyond the powers of most parents! But the *context* in which the teaching is given is important. Merely to explain to boys and girls that man is a mammal and the laws of reproduction apply to him as to other mammals is not enough, and its insufficiency is realized by many teachers. The courtship and marriage of two people is not a private act; it affects society. There is much to be said for the point of view expressed in a leading acticle in *Nature* [1] that "Science" in secondary schools nearly always means physics, chemistry and biology, two of them sciences of matter and one of animal life. Sociology, the science of man and society, is elbowed out of the over-crowded curriculum. "In our schools science should be utilized in the study of such problems as individual and public health, of nutritional standards, housing, population movements, race and nation, family life, of the relations and responsibilities of one person to another, and of the social policy of the State."

In the Home

There is far more to sex education than the acquisition of certain biological and sociological facts. Children's first questions are asked not at school but at home. They are asked at an early age. But anyone who thinks that factual information given at the age of five is remembered at fourteen is forgetting that memory is dependent on reminder. Far more important than instruction is the unconscious communication of values from parents to children. The mother who hedges and gets confused when her child asks her bluntly where babies come from is all unconsciously educating her child to believe that there is something queer or even wrong about the origin of babies. At the family meal table a sea of talk flows about the child, only partially understood; but from that talk about friends and neighbours he forms the impression that babies are gifts or calamities, that marriage is a good thing or a bad joke. No school or any other body can easily eradicate by factual teaching the values subconsciously taken over by the child from his family.[2]

Sex education cannot rightly be separated from the art of home-making—in fact it is a great pity that the very term has ever come into general use. It is now deeply rooted in the modern mind

[1] *Nature*, November 13th, 1943. 1s. 6d.

[2] Dr. Marjorie Reeves, in *Children of the Future*, makes a strong case for the triumph of emotional over intellectual impressions. Kingsgate Press, 4 Southampton Row, W.C. 1, 6d.

that " sex " is a thing in itself and not a part of making a home and rearing a family. Seen in its true perspective sex education is one part of home making. Even when the strongest case has been made for education for marriage to be given in the school or the young people's college, something is very badly wrong with our homes if cookery, housewifery, mothercraft, and preparation for marriage and parenthood have to be learned in the school *or not at all*. Our aim must be to create in the schools to-day a generation of future parents who for their children will make the teaching of these arts in the school unnecessary.

ENABLING THE FAMILY TO FUNCTION

An attempt to ensure for every young person in this country a *right teaching* on sex is not going to yield the results which we desire in promoting more healthy married life unless equal attention is given to another side of the problem.

The problem can perhaps be most clearly posed by asking this question. Among the mass of organizations which have been thrown up by our society, where will you find any which is devoted not to the needs of individuals, but to the specific need of *families* as such ? We have a vast number of women's organizations of all kinds. Their educational work varies from the wide range of homecraft activities organized by such bodies as the Women's Institutes, to the regular training of mothers in religious education for their young children given by the Mothers' Union and other religious bodies. But the voluntary organization which brings the young married couple under educative influence and is designed wholly to enable them to fulfil their own task is still a thing of the future.

For this reason a recent book describing the experimental work of the Peckham Health Centre [1] is of very great interest. Here at Peckham before the war there flourished a large club whose membership was not for men, nor for women, nor for children, but only for families as such. The promulgators of this experiment were a group of biologists who set themselves the task of discovering how to help families to find their own happiness in producing and rearing healthy and happy children.

The Peckham Health Centre began in an unpretentious house with very limited finance. The imposing buildings which it occupied when the outbreak of war put a temporary end to its activities were only built when the experiment was a proved success. The biologists who started the scheme assumed that if it were available married couples would appreciate a regular medical overhaul for themselves and their children if they already had any,

[1] *The Peckham Experiment: a Study of the Living Structure of Society*, by Innes H. Pearse and Lucy H. Crocker. George Allen and Unwin, 12s. 6d.

and advice on health and marriage problems. They proved that they were right in their assumption.

The centre now consists of a large block of buildings surrounding a swimming pool. The whole equipment of the centre is designed to enable families to improve their own health for a basic subscription of 1s. a week for each family. Nothing is organized for them, but the material is provided for every kind of sport, for dancing, amateur theatricals, indoor games, gymnastics and meals. Within the centre the members of the families do some things together, some things separately, some things with members of other families, and as they pursue these activities, slowly a social life of families is built up.

If the things which are said in this book are true, and they are the well documented experiences of years of work with many hundreds of families, then one of the worst diseases of our time is not economic, but *social* poverty. To illustrate what they mean by this term, the writers of the book describe the upbringing of the girls who are the present generation of young mothers. "It is not at all uncommon to find a girl who as a schoolgirl of eleven or twelve was wakened by her mother with an early cup of tea. She has never been allowed, far less expected, to do a hand's turn in the work of the house, and has never even mended her own clothes nor cleaned her own shoes. She goes from primary school to secondary school or commercial college, and becomes a lady clerk. She goes about in the car or pillion riding with her men friends; she is able to go to many dances and pay for a yearly holiday away from home. Sailing through her young life under the auxiliary power of maternal solicitude she has lived without any need whatsoever of knowledge or experience of domesticity. What happens when she comes to marriage? Not only does she bring no bottom drawer, but she brings no dowry of skill. Perhaps worst of all she comes to marriage with the sense of having attained her goal. The implication this brings with it is that there is nothing for her to do but to continue in this state sustained by a loving husband." A baby which will have to be fed, clothed, reared and cared for is a terrifying prospect, one which she feels incapable of facing. Contraceptives are almost universally known and used, but the writers out of their experience declare that their widespread use only serves to mask a higher percentage of non-consummation of marriage, infertility and rarity of connection than have been suspected. In other words, the failure of young married couples to grow from the courting stage to that of parenthood results in devitalization.

The conclusions drawn about the state of family life are not cheerful, but the main part of the book is concerned, not with observation, but with practical action. Many young couples have

been brought out of their self-absorbed isolation into finding their happiness in children and in social relationships with other families. Help has been given at the right moment and at the point of their need. Changes have taken place in the whole outlook and way of life of many families without any change in their economic status.

A different but equally important light on modern trends is thrown by the work of the London clinic of the Marriage Guidance Council (78 Duke Street, W. 1), which in the past year has dealt with more than 400 broken marriages. Its organizers have come to the conclusion that the most frequent cause of disruption is the failure of men to understand women and women to understand men. Modern equality masks the differences in nearly every other sphere of life, but in marriage they have to be faced. The second cause to which they ascribe the ease with which married couples decide to break apart is the lightness with which they regard the marriage vows, and the general popular understanding that the new divorce laws have made marriage a matter of temporary convenience.

THE CHURCHES

The most disappointing feature in the Home and Family statement of the British Council of Churches is that of its sixty-four pages, one and a quarter are devoted to a paragraph headed, "The Family and the Church." But this is just what we want to know! We are told "the recent history of the family makes clamant the call for the Church to co-operate in a fresh and adventurous way in laying the foundations on which a vigorous and healthy family life can be reared in the modern world." But how? We hope to hear more.

What are the Church's assets in this matter? First, in spite of all the inroads made by current practice into Christian marriage standards in matters of sex, they are still the norm. There is no accepted alternative. We take it for granted, for instance, that continence and fidelity will be taught in our schools. Secondly, throughout its long history, in spite of many social changes, the Church has always been primarily a family of families. Thirdly, no other organization in the country has such free access to the homes of the people as the Church has through its clergy and ministers. Fourthly, although we may say that, on a rough estimate, only 10 per cent of our population regularly attend public worship, 67 per cent of the babies born in this country are baptized in the Church of England, and a Church marriage is still commonly preferred to a State marriage. Thus the Church has contact with married couples at two strategic points in their lives.

But the liabilities are serious and we have to face them squarely. First, although it is true that Christian standards of sexual conduct are still the norm, they are widely disregarded. Nor would it be right to assume that because a large number of people practise the

Christian virtues of chastity and fidelity that they do so because the Church says so. Second, at the two points at which the conscience of the ordinary person is most seriously exercised, the use of contraceptives and the question of divorce, the witness of the Church is divided and thereby weakened and misunderstood. Thirdly, painful as it may be to us to admit it, we must honestly say that when married couples find themselves in difficulties it is not to the Church that they turn for help. They turn more readily to the doctor, and doctors (or many of them) think that it is their job. (One doctor was probably speaking for many others when he said: "A large proportion of the cases which come to my surgery—various forms of neurosis—would in the old days have found their way to the confessional! I am being asked to be a new priest.")[1] Fourthly, particularly among young people, there is a widespread idea that the Church is not itself what they would call clean-minded on the subject of sex, that it still treats women as inferior beings, and handles sex questions with kid gloves on.

The first concern of the churches must be with their own members, who are not more immune from the problems and tendencies of the day than outsiders. Some churches and groups of churches have experimented successfully with lectures for their own members. Others have started parents' groups, where young parents can discuss their problems, beginning entirely informally in somebody's house. There will be greater possibilities for this when young fathers return after the war. We must not sell out here to the idea that activities of this kind can only be run by trained experts. The pooled resources of groups of families are a mine of wisdom if they can only be tapped.

But if we come to discuss how the churches can make effective impact upon those who only come for marriage and for baptism, we raise questions enough to fill several books. We cannot expect the clergy to maintain contact with every couple they marry and every baby they baptize unless they are to abandon a great deal of their present work. Is it the job of churches as such to run their own "Peckham experiments"? The real hope lies not in what the single parson can do wrestling with a vast parish or in vastly expensive schemes, but in the activities of Christians through voluntary organizations and State-provided social services and in the quality of the existing Christian homes.

[1] The Royal College of Physicians has recently published a memorandum urging the inclusion in the already overcrowded curriculum of the medical student of a course of elementary psychiatry to enable the general practioner to deal with difficulties which arise largely out of wrong personal relationships.

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